

Bluffton City Council Meeting

July 6, 2020

Agenda

1. Minutes from Prior Meeting(s)
2. Reports (Cemetery, Fire, Public Safety, Water, etc.)
3. Nomination of Mayor to succeed Odom, through Dec. 31- Mayor Pro-Tem Aldene Lee
4. Adjourn

Upcoming Dates: Next meeting- August 3

Items excluded from July agenda:

- Request by White Oak Pastures to ask the council for a direct long-term lease of the Bluffton community house for company office space.

Reasons for exclusion:

City Attorney Tommy Coleman advised Bluffton that such arrangements (e.g. granting direct leases of public property to private entities, and/or councilmembers voting to grant public property to their employers) were illegal, in August 2019.

In response, attorneys claiming to represent White Oak Pastures sent a letter that seemed to suggest that WOP would sue Bluffton if the council refused to break the law and grant a direct lease (or otherwise voted as a legislative body to make transfers of public property) to WOP. The letter was reported to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Later in August 2019, the council agreed to put the former Courthouse out for a legal bidding process, thus giving White Oak Pastures a chance to renew their lease on the building at a market rate. In the first instance, White Oak Pastures put in a winning bid but never signed the lease renewed by the council. After the lease expired, the city received an alternative proposal that seemed to specify that Bluffton would have to pay for unlimited renovations to the building should White Oak Pastures ever vacate the Courthouse. Mr. Coleman deemed it an onerous contract, and no agreement was reached.

In the second instance, Bluffton did not receive a bid according to the legally advertised terms. Instead, the city received a legal threat dated Jan. 30 and signed solely by Mr. Harris, stating an intention to sue Bluffton for \$139297 unless the city council voted to both rent the former United Methodist Church building for \$1 per year and renew the agreement every three years. The leases on both buildings have expired.

Mr. Coleman restated his legal opinion in person at the March 2020 meeting. No subsequent real estate agreements involving any party have been approved by the city.